

Who We Are

Upon This Rock, Part 1

Matthew 16:18

On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled by a 5-4 vote that marriage between a man and a man was a fundamental right, as protected by the Constitution as marriage between a man and a woman.

The tragedy in this decision, to me, was not so much the decision – or even the issue – or even the redefining of marriage.

No, the greater tragedy was the argument before the Supreme Court that decisions based on any moral judgment were inadmissible and irrelevant.

An even greater tragedy was the fact that our culture and its highest court now intentionally, openly, defy the created order of God the Father whose original design for marriage was repeated by God the Son in Matthew 19 – Jesus said to his audience, ***God created them male and female***, and said, ***“For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh . . . (now listen to this warning which now takes on new meaning – and what therefore God has joined together – male and female – let no man put asunder. (Matthew 19:6)***

Beloved, whenever any nation or even a generation abandons the intuitive knowledge of a Creator – and the God-breathed writings of scripture – that generation effectively opens Pandora’s Box; it throws away its rudder, its oars, its compass and its lifejacket.

And here’s the danger; it simply will not be able to navigate the turbulent waters it has created.

Confusion like we’ve never seen it is now going to grow exponentially. Even now there are bathrooms in elementary schools in California for children who aren’t sure if they’re a boy or a girl.

The marginalization and hostility toward Christianity will certainly follow as we remind our world of our Creator and His created order.

In fact, on Supreme Court justice wrote in his dissent of the court’s decision – and I quote – “[this] will be used to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy . . . the implications of this analogy [to human rights] will be exploited by those who are determined to stamp out every vestige of dissent.”

Let me just tell you, every pastor I’ve talked to – every church I know about – in fact, every ABF I spoke to this past summer at Colonial as I went around to a dozen of them while you enjoyed speakers from around the world – they all are asking the same thing – what do we do now?

What do we do now?

We begin our worship services in the evenings here in the Chapel at 6:00 pm tonight. I’m going to begin another series of studies in the Psalms of David. And the Psalm for tonight has been selected because it asks that classic question, “What do the righteous do when the foundations are destroyed?”

In other words, what do believers do when the foundations are gone?

That word is rare – only used twice in the Old Testament; it refers to the settled order of things – when things are rightly ordered. In other words, what do you do when the settled order is destroyed?

We’re going to begin exploring the answer tonight.

One of my projects this summer was to finish editing my commentary on the Book of Titus. For those of you who write, you know that it’s more of a

chore than anything. This is the fifth commentary in the series and by far the largest with more than 300 pages.

I actually wanted to go back and review it again anyway, because it occurred to me that one of the repeated qualifications for elders – the leaders in the church – is the requirement that if he is married, he is married to one wife.

The traditional debate on this text has always focused on divorce or polygamy – but it occurred to me; Paul is living in a day in which homosexuality is rampant; we know from history that bisexuality was actually the popular opinion of the day – in fact, if you claimed to be strictly heterosexual you were considered out of touch and somewhat prudish.

And yet Paul makes this declaration under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – that an elder must be, literally – the Greek text reads – *a one-woman man*.

In other words, if he's married, he must demonstrate openly and faithfully his commitment to his *woman (I Timothy 3 & Titus 1)*.

That has new meaning for today, doesn't it?

I basically went back into my commentary this summer, because even 2 years ago when I preached through the Book of Titus it didn't occur to me until this summer that perhaps in the mind of Paul – and God, who inspired him, – was the fact that the leadership in the church had to be willing to be entirely countercultural in that they were singularly committed to demonstrating God's design for marriage by marrying a woman.

And as elders, they would effectively be the last people on the planet to *put asunder* what God created to bring *together*.

By the way, this qualification now gives new meaning to all the churches and all the pastors and leaders out there who are also openly defying God's intended order for marriage – and God's clear qualification for those who will shepherd His flock.

Some of you are old enough to remember the ministry of a philosopher and apologist by the name of Francis Schaeffer. He spent a lot of time while visiting in the States, from Switzerland, criticizing and warning and challenging the church in America.

I remember as a little boy when Francis Schaeffer actually came to my home church – I remember that non-denominational, rather formal church where I was raised was packed and every seat filled; I can still see in my memory Francis Schaeffer standing at the front – and he had on grayish-brown tweed knickers.

In fact, all I can remember from his visit were his knickers.

So I obviously missed the moment.

Frances Schaeffer was fond of saying that someday the church would wake up and find out that the America we once knew was gone.ⁱ

I agree with Erwin Lutzer's recent assessment where he wrote, "That day is here."ⁱⁱ

And I want you to know I'm excited about it – not the opposition we have **to** the gospel, but the opportunity we have **for** the gospel.

What a great time to be a lighthouse of truth, amen?

And let me say the obvious – we're not going to change our view of marriage. We're not going to form a committee to explore the changing sexual ethics in light of an evolving culture.

We are going to stand on the clear word of God.

But let me add that there has never been a more important time than today for the church to clarify her role – her doctrine – her gospel – her holy obligation – her character – her mission in this world.

Because that day is here – we as an elder team believed that the Lord would have us interrupt our normally scheduled program through the Book of Philippians and clarify these issues.

Additionally, our elder team is just about finished with the fine tuning of our new constitution and bylaws. What began about six years ago as an attempt to rewrite the section of church discipline and clarify the role of elders and deacons, turned into a great opportunity over the past two years especially.

The timing has been perfect – which none of us could have foreseen – and this process has allowed us to clarify our stand on a number of issues related not only to discipline, and doctrine – which we haven't changed – but to clearly address moral and sexual issues as well as clarifications on the role of elders and deacons – roles that have been fully developed here at Colonial over these last 10 years especially.

Over the next several weeks, you will be given these documents – otherwise known as our Constitution (which is our doctrinal statement) – and our Bylaws – which are related to how we function . . . we're also planning to hold several Q and A sessions at the end of this fall.

But what I want to do is take the next ten weeks and preach a series of messages I've simply entitled, Upon This Rock.

Lord willing, I'll preach from a selected number of passages on:

- who we are;
- why we belong;
- what we believe – and don't believe;
- how we behave – in here and out there;
- why we're accountable – to holy living;
- how we disciple and discipline – two words from the same Greek word;
- how we mobilize;
- and finally, what we're looking forward to.

Listen, I want you to know that I am thrilled to be living in this day and time – in this culture and this generation when the tectonic shifts are occurring.

I am excited, not because I want trouble, but because it provides the true church with the perfect opportunity to be distinguished by the truth; we have the opportunity to clarify our message and our motive and our mission . . .

Let's ask that God will do in our midst a purifying work that clarifies our gospel and refocuses our sights on what really matters and deepens our love for and our concern for our world which is lost and wandering in the darkness of sin and human opinion.

Let's begin at the beginning with who we are. I'll give you the principle and then the text.

1. **We are mastered by an unrivaled Master.**

Turn to the Gospel by Matthew and specifically to chapter 16.

Verse 13 tells us that Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, and He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

It's interesting to consider the fact Jesus is asking this question in an area that had at least fourteen temples in the neighborhood dedicated to ancient Baal worship. And nearby was the cavern where people said the god Pan was born – the god of nature. Also, in this region was the magnificent temple of white marble dedicated to the deity of Caesar, built by Herod the Great. Here, surrounded by the incredible beauty of temples and all the evidence you would ever need to believe there are

certainly more gods than one, here is Jesus asking His disciples who they think He is.ⁱⁱⁱ

And the disciples rattle off all the rumors – *verse 14, John the Baptist; Elijah; Jeremiah or one of the prophets* – in other words, Jesus is just another prophet in the line of prophets.

Or maybe the prophet Jeremiah; the Jews of Jesus' day were clinging to the legend that Jeremiah had hidden the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant and the altar somewhere in a cave and that he would rise from the dead and reveal the contents and restore Israel to her former glory.^{iv}

Notice verse 15 – and here's the crucial question that not only every disciple was going to answer in the first century, but what everyone will one day give an account as to their answer when they stand before Jesus who will be seated as sovereign Lord and Judge at that Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20).

Who do you say that I am?

- Just another prophet in a long line of prophets?
- A good man?
- A motivational speaker who delivered the golden rule and never said anything judgmental about anybody?

Who do you say that I am?

Listen there is not a more important question that you will ever answer in your life, than this one.

Peter responds in *verse 16, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Peter's response declares two things: first that Jesus was the anointed Messiah – the Christos. Secondly, that Jesus Christ was nothing less than deity.

In the original language, this phrase is only 10 words, but the definite article appears 4 times; let me translate it woodenly to give you the fullest effect: You are *the* Christ; *the* Son of *the* God, *the* living One.

You are the unrivaled and unequalled God in the flesh.

I'd like to stay here and expound of all of what this means, but I'm trying to get through this verse to *verse 18*.

But let me at least say that based on this declaration:

- Jesus isn't just another **prophet** – He is the glorious subject and eternal consummation of prophecy;

- He isn't just a **teacher** – He is the eternal Word – the Logos of Deity who spoke the worlds into existence;
- He isn't just a **man** – He is the God-man, fully God and now fully man at His virgin birth; God – so that He can forgive us; man – so that He can die for us;
- And He isn't just a nice, positive thinking, golden rule giver – oh no, He is the coming judge of all mankind – the Apostle Paul will warn his world and ours that Christ will one day dispense the holy wrath of God which is even now being stored up until the day of His judgment. (*Romans 2:5*)

Politicians and professors and pundits are congratulating each other over the sophistication and advancement of our rewritten morals – we're evolving, one leader commented – it's about time we grew past that old notion of a single deity and the idea of moral judgment!

They're clapping each other on the back and reminding everyone that you don't want to be on the wrong side of history.

Listen, you don't want to be on the wrong side of God.

Jesus informs Peter that his statement was actually inspired by God the Father and then says in *verse 18, But I say to you that you are Peter* – Petros – a small stone - and upon this rock – now the Lord uses the word *petra* – a play on words – an immovable rock – and upon this bedrock, Peter, I will build my church.

Peter, you're a little stone – a pebble – one of many stones that Christ will build into a living house (*1 Peter 2:5*); and all who believe in the person and character of Christ are built into Christ Himself.

Listen, when Jesus said this, his disciples would have immediately recognized Christ's divine claim. Peter wasn't the bedrock – Jesus was.

This was an attribute belonging to God.

- ***He is the Rock, His work is perfect (Deut. 32:4);***
- ***The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer (2 Samuel 22:2);***
- ***For who is God but the Lord; and who is a rock but our God? (Psalm 18:31).***

In other words, Jesus is saying to Peter that on the basis of his testimony in who Christ was, Jesus

now promises to build His church upon the bedrock of who He is.

And I love this prophecy . . . as you can imagine, it's one of my all-time favorites. ***I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.***

The gates were the place just inside the fortified doors of a walled city. The Gate was the Town Hall of the ancient world, where plans would be designed by the city fathers; where strategies for advancement would be determined.

Jesus says here that all the plans and the strategies of the leadership of Hell will not be able to overpower His church.

The word here for the **church** is the Greek word *ekklesia* – those who are called out or summoned.

We have been summoned by the electing, saving work of Christ and we have become His church by His grace – and church that is universal in scope; local in each demonstration of grace.

He is our builder and maker; He is our defender against the plans of the underworld; He is our Master and Lord.

He is absolutely unrivaled!

Listen, if you don't get Jesus right, you don't get the gospel right. You don't get your life right, and you certainly don't get the church right.

Here's who we are – we are the servants of an unrivaled Master.

We have been placed securely upon the Bedrock of Who His is, and He will never waver or be moved.

Let's not talk about standing on the Rock and then act as if we're clinging to a piece of driftwood, and we're not sure if the church will survive.^v

We're not clinging to driftwood . . . we are standing on the Bedrock of the Ages.

We are mastered by an unrivaled Master.

2. Secondly, we are messengers of an unchanging manifesto

Webster defines a manifesto as a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer

The Apostle Paul wrote to a young pastor and reminded him that the **church is pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15)**

God has delivered to us and through us His manifesto – His intentions, motives and views on

that *which pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3)*.

He didn't ask us to make it up. We don't deliver our opinion, but His. This wasn't our message first; it was His.

One author wrote recently; we are called to be people of the truth, even when the truth isn't popular and even when the truth is denied. God's truth has not changed; The Scriptures have not changed; the gospel of Jesus Christ has not changed – it is still *the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes it (Romans 1:16)*.^{vi}

Again, here's one of the reasons I'm excited about the potential of the true church in the days ahead.

We are surrounded, one author wrote in a recent journal, by cultural Christianity. Cultural Christians, he wrote, represent as much as 25% of the so-called Christians in our country.

But if you take a closer look, as this author did through polling with more stringent questions, he found a huge segment of people who said they were Christian because it simply sounded better to them than saying they were atheists or Jewish or pagan.

But now – the author went on to suggest – when calling yourself a Christian identifies you with people who are marginalized and mocked, these unconverted so-called “Christians” will drop away.

This author went on to identify another large segment of so-called Christians in America. They account for another 25% of the population. He called them Congregational Christians.

He wrote, these people generally did not express any real life- commitment to Christ, but they referred to themselves as Christians because they had some loose connection to a church – through a family member, their baptism, their membership in a nearby church and a record of sporadic attendance.

They go because it offers them some peace of mind and a good reputation . . . again; when the church loses the approval of culture – indeed, the revulsion and resentment of culture, this segment will quietly disappear.

With both cultural Christians and congregational Christians, the author summarized, they call themselves Christian, but there has never been any life change or commitment to the Scriptures or the church – they want whatever they have for whatever it dose for them . . . they are Christians in name only.^{vii}

What this author suggested will arise is what he called convictional Christians. Churches that are robust and committed to Christ and His word – no matter what.

Frankly, I'm looking forward to the day when the true church is clearly defined by expositional preaching and a genuine desire to worship our Holy and gracious God.

A.W. Tozer once wrote several decades ago that the lack of genuine exposition of scripture is often nothing more than the preacher's unwillingness to get himself into trouble.

Tozer reminded his generation – and we need the reminder again today that preachers are not diplomats delivering compromises – they are prophets delivering ultimatums.

And this is the church as well. We have a manifesto from our Master – we are messengers delivering His intentions and His will and His viewpoint.

Just yesterday in the mail I got another large, colorful card inviting me to yet another church that promised me energetic music, dynamic preaching and great kids programs.

I'd love to get a card advertising a church where the messages were not advertised as dynamic, but faithfully and tediously committed to the text – and where books of the Bible would be taught for years and years and years; where the music wasn't advertised as energetic, but as true to the nature and character of God.

I hope that the scoffing of culture will sober up the church; to remind us that our job isn't figuring out how to be relevant or trendy or entertaining or cool.

I'm praying that the jeering of our culture returns the church to the glory of Jesus and the exaltation of our Savior.

This was the prayer of Paul for the church in Ephesus where he wrote to them, *“I bow my knees before the Father . . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit . . . to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen (Ephesians 3:14-21)*

Listen, I can't think of a better day for us to be alive – to be mastered by the divine Master . . . to be a messenger of His divine manifesto.

To shine the light of the gospel to those who are bound in sin and darkness.

No lighthouse was ever built to get rid of a storm; no lighthouse was ever constructed with the idea that heavy winds would run away and hide.

Its very purpose was to shine in the middle of the storm and offer a way home to those who looked for its light.

So if you see a storm brewing, that is not a signal that you have failed, or that you are no longer needed or that you need to turn off the light . . . or turn it down.

Don't give up . . . stay the course . . . keep shining.

A few weeks ago I watched the painful footage of that female Olympic athlete who was competing in the 10,000 meter race at the World Athletics Championships in Beijing. An American, she was clearly in third place in what she admitted was a once-in-a-lifetime moment.

As she neared the tape, she was unaware of another runner moving up behind her on the inside track. Still you could tell from the footage that she would easily win her medal if she just kept her pace . . . there were only a few steps left.

But three steps away from the tape, this young athlete began to celebrate – she threw her hands in the air in victory, which immediately broke her rhythm and the other runner shot past her and won.

The large photo in USA Today just captured it all as it showed her weeping, with her face in her hands. She would later say, the Olympics are a hard race,

and this probably won't ever come around [for me] again.

I couldn't help but think – it's too early for the world to celebrate. The race of history is not over yet.

And if I can reverse the analogy, let me encourage you with the fact that it is also too early for the church to announce defeat.

No matter what the footage and the verdicts and the public announcements declare . . . it's too early for the church to announce that it has lost.

So stay in the race . . .

- Never has the church been more needed than today.
- Never has the lighthouse been more needed than as these storm clouds gather.
- Never has there been a need in our country – in our generation – for winsome, gracious, truthful, faithful, honest, hardworking, pure Christians to be more than cultural or congregational Christians.
- Never in our lifetime, and in the history of our nation, has there been such a need for messengers of the divine manifesto who are completely mastered by their Divine Master, having taken their stand upon the bedrock of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/13/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Erwin W. Lutzer, Where Do We Go From Here? (Moody Publishers, 2013), p. 1

ii Ibid

iii Adapted from William Barclay, Matthew: Volume 2 (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 134

iv John Phillips, Exploring the Gospel of Matthew (Loizeaux Brothers, 1999), p. 347

v Adapted from Erwin Lutzer, Where Do We Go From Here (Moody Publishers, 2013), p. 26

vi Adapted from Al Mohler, "Everything Has Changed and Nothing Has Changed" @ www.albertmohler.com/2015/06/27

vii Adapted from an article by Ed Stetzer in Christianity Today, "Mission Trends".